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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA  
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INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1013  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0021  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2523  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8784  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2039  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000303

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/PB  
STATE FOR SCA/PPD, PA/RRU  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S NOWRUZ MESSAGE TO IRAN

11. Summary: President Obama's Nowruz message to Iran received extensive coverage in the local media, both English and vernacular. Newspaper editorials across the political spectrum praised the President's message and called on Iran to accept the U.S. offer of dialogue. President Obama's messages of dialogue and reconciliation with the Muslim world resonate extremely well in this moderate Muslim-majority nation of 150 million people. We will continue to leverage the President's popularity in Bangladesh to advance key bilateral and multilateral goals in Bangladesh. End summary.

12. A selection of media reaction follows:

1A. "U.S. OLIVE BRANCH TO IRAN; AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP," an editorial in the March 22 generally neutral English newspaper THE DAILY STAR:

"The U.S. President's overture to Iran on the eve of the Persian New Year Nowruz is a significant departure from his predecessor's policy that never lost a chance to refer to Iran as a part of the axis of evil. We welcome the change of attitude of an establishment that had looked at Iran, and indeed much of the Middle East and the Muslim world, with a blinkered vision (sic). Mr. Obama should be congratulated for taking the first step, as he had promised in his campaign he would, seeking engagement with Iran that was 'honest and based on mutual respect....' To build on the offer we feel that the first step for both the countries should be to create an environment of trust by appreciating and acknowledging the real compulsions of each other."

1B. "OBAMA'S PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH IRAN," an editorial in the March 22 generally anti-West Bangla vernacular daily INQILAB:

"President Obama, within the first two months of his presidency, proposed an end to the long period of distrust and enmity between Iran and the U.S. His desire for developing relations between the two countries is a significant U.S. foreign policy indicator. This proposal can be considered as a new initiative to rebuild a relationship that has been without formal diplomatic ties since 11980. President Obama pledged during his election campaign that he would develop a relationship between the two countries. We thank President Obama for his good wishes and intent to start a dialogue, ignoring the path of conflict, with Iran. Iran should respond to President Obama's proposal with cooperation and understanding."

1C. "IRAN SHOULD CAREFULLY CONSIDER PRESIDENT OBAMA'S PROPOSAL," an editorial in the March 22 pro-U.S. vernacular daily Ittefaq:

"Nothing can be achieved by terrorism or by weapons. Rather, peaceful activities are required to develop people and civilizations. The Iranian government and the international

community, including the European Union (EU), welcomed President Obama's desire for peace. The Obama administration wants to reduce its differences with the Muslim world, created by former President Bush. Many could see President Obama's desire for peace with the Muslim world as a key part of U.S. foreign policy when President Obama stated shortly after his inauguration that he intended to visit a Muslim country soon."

¶D. "IRAN SHOULD ACCEPT OBAMA'S PROPOSAL FOR DIRECT TALKS," an editorial in the March 23 Jamaat- and BNP-leaning vernacular daily NAYA DIGANTA:

"U.S. President Barak Obama recently urged the resumption of diplomatic discussions with Iran. He diverted from decades of U.S. foreign policy in making this overture... In a recorded video, President Obama said his administration was committed to diplomacy. President Obama also pledged a new start, setting aside the bilateral jabs of the past. The international community welcomed President Obama's decision. At this point, we also welcome President's Obama's push for dialog in favor of the peace loving people of the world.

¶E. "IRAN SHOULD SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY, TAKE OBAMA'S DIALOGUE OFFER," an editorial in the March 22 BNP-leaning English daily NEW NATION:

"Barack Obama on Friday released a video message with Farsi subtitles that urged the two countries to resolve their long-standing differences.... The gesture of goodwill from President Obama is something that Iran did not consider since the fall of King Reza Shah and the birth of the Islamic revolution that made Iran an Islamic Republic three decades ago. The response from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sounds pragmatic. In fact,

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Iran should seize the opportunity to end the mistrust that developed between the two nations over the decades. Obama promised this before his election, and it would be wise to give the U.S. President a chance to try to change the world through dialogue and understanding.... Since Barack Obama has signaled for fruitful dialogue, Iranian leaders should use all avenues to help make the initiative successful. After all, peaceful relations between the Muslims and the U.S. would end the principal cause of tension in current international relations and, hopefully, also help stop the wars."

PASI